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COUNTRY Germany (Russian Zone)

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SUBJECT SMA Pressure on Bourgeois Parties
 before the SED Volkskongress

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1. At a meeting of the unity committee of the "Antifa" bloc parties on 24 November 1947, which was attended by Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, Walter Ulbricht, Arthur Lieutenant, Dr. Eugen Schiffer, Jacob Kaiser, Ernst Lemmer, and Otto Nuschke, Kaiser voiced his opposition to any measure conceived by the committee for the presentation of a plea for German unity to the foreign ministers in London. He stated that he had discussed the matter fully with Dr. Josef Müller, chairman of the Bavarian CSU, and was persuaded that such a step would be inadvisable, not because of its nature, but because of its source. Western Germany, already suspicious of Russian influence in the East, would interpret the move as a Russian propaganda drive and as an indication of the complete subservience of all parties of the eastern zone to the occupying power and the SED. In spite of heated arguments and various accusations made by the SED leaders in particular, Kaiser remained firm in this position.

2. Three days later the plans for the Volkskongress (People's Congress for Unity and a Lasting Peace) were announced by the SED. SMA offices throughout the Russian Zone did their utmost to insure the success of the congress. Tulpanov informed Pieck and Ulbricht that it was the last opportunity of the SED to prove its worth; if the congress should fail, the party would forfeit SMA backing. In view of CDU opposition, it seemed particularly important to the Russians that the congress have firm LDP support. As a result, Arthur Bretschneider, chairman of the LDP in Saxony, who shortly before had expressed dissatisfaction with Wilhelm Külz's Russophile policy, was prevented from attending the meeting of the Party Executive Committee in Berlin on 1 December which decided the stand to be taken by the LDP on the issue. Party headquarters in Mecklenburg, Thuringia, Brandenburg, and Saxony-Anhalt promised the SMA their unconditional cooperation. The executive committee meeting went smoothly and according to plan. Major Golovchiner of the SMA was present. After a long speech by Külz recommending participation, various opinions were advanced. A dissenting voice proved to be that of Dr. Walter Kunze, Minister of Finance in Brandenburg, who contended that the Volkskongress was purely an SED affair. Nevertheless, his objection was overridden, and the LDP voted in favor of sending delegates.

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3. The greatest difficulties were encountered by the SMA and the SED in their attempts to persuade CDU leaders to support the congress. CDU leaders on all levels in the Eastern Zone were approached repeatedly by the SMA and told the following: Full cooperation for the Berlin Volkskongress is expected. This conference will determine future Russian policy in Germany, and those who refuse to attend may hold themselves responsible if the policy proves to be a hard one. The SMA is not absolutely opposed to Kaiser, but feels that he has been misguided by western influences. This is the opportunity for the lower party units to indicate to the Party Executive Committee in Berlin that they are displeased with the course which Kaiser is pursuing.
4. Professor Hugo Hickmann, chairman of the CDU in Saxony, was subjected to particular pressure when CDU headquarters stated its intention of backing Kaiser and voting against the Volkskongress.

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Dr. Wilhelm Wolf, CDU chairman in Brandenburg, was required by the SMA in Potsdam to send telegrams to county committees announcing the participation of the Brandenburg CDU in the Volkskongress. In Thuringia Russian policy received unconditional approval of the CDU when Wilhelm Bachem, Minister of Transportation, and Rücker pointed out to their colleagues that disagreement might endanger their personal security. Dr. Reinhold Lobedanz, chairman of the Mecklenburg CDU, assured the SMA that he would vote in favor of the Volkskongress. Therefore, on the eve of the CDU Executive Committee meeting many party members feared that Kaiser would be obliged to reverse his decision.

5. At the meeting an embarrassing moment occurred when Kaiser protested against the presence of the SMA political officer, Captain Kratin, who nevertheless remained, instructing Kaiser to speak freely. Kaiser did so, outlining his objections to the Volkskongress in full. As a compromise measure, Dr. Leo Herwegen suggested that the SED be requested to postpone the congress and put it on a broader basis; Muschke, who had been visited by Captain Kratin the previous day, proposed that the party, while not actually appointing delegates, give the Volkskongress its public approval. The final decision was that the party would not send delegates but would permit individual members to attend, in view of the difficult circumstances in which persons residing in the Russian Zone might otherwise find themselves.
6. No particular pressure was brought to bear upon the Berlin SPD to force it to approve the congress. Louise Schröder and Dr. Otto Suhr were invited to make the opening address, but both declined on the ground that persons holding elective offices may not participate officially in a public gathering of this nature which has not been approved by all parties.

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